Statement Regarding Reported ICE Operation Targeting Unaccompanied M

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As Voices for Utah Children, we are deeply concerned about reports of a new ICE operation, reportedly referred to as “Freaky Friday”, which is said to target unaccompanied minors as young as 14, and possibly as young as 10, beginning immediately. These are children who were previously detained in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

While ICE has publicly denied that it operates under a plan by that name, advocates and legal service providers across the country have raised consistent alarms that children are being contacted and pressured under similar circumstances. These reports demand urgent oversight and transparency.

What we’ve learned from credible national sources indicates that:

- Children may be receiving letters pressuring them to withdraw applications for relief and waive protections guaranteed under the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA).
- They may be offered $2,500 to return to their countries of origin under what ICE describes as a “voluntary resettlement stipend”, to be paid only after departure and following judicial approval.

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- Advocacy groups warn that this practice could amount to coercion if children are not fully informed of their rights or if legal counsel is absent during these interactions.
- The initiative reportedly also targets youth who “age out” of ORR custody upon turning 18. However, a federal court has now blocked ICE from placing those young people in adult detention, citing serious due process and child welfare concerns.

We are especially troubled that children (some possibly as young as 10) could be pressured into abandoning their legal protections through tactics that include fear-based communication or threats directed at their families. This raises profound concerns about intimidation, due process, and child safety.

Here in Utah, this issue is particularly urgent. In 2025 alone, 198 unaccompanied minors have already been released to sponsors in our state. Each of these children could be directly affected by these reported practices, whether through misinformation, coercive contact, or policy changes that undermine their rights.

We call on Utah’s elected officials, legal advocates, and child welfare agencies to demand transparency and accountability from ICE and ORR, to ensure no child is misled, intimidated, or coerced into self-deportation.

Children who have endured trauma and separation deserve care, safety, and access to the protections our laws provide. Not fear, pressure, or false choices.

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